

EXETER-WEST GREENWICH March 22, 2011

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

MINUTES

The Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District School Committee held a meeting on this date at Metcalf Elementary School. The School Committee met in Executive Session at 5:30 p.m. in the library. Members present were Gregory Coutcher, Chairperson; Teri Maia-Cicero, Vice Chairperson; Valerie Zuercher, Clerk; Theresa Donovan, Paul McFadden, and Claudine Pande. Others present: Superintendent Thomas J. Geismar, Attorney Vincent Ragosta. The School Committee met in Open Session at 6:05 p.m. in the cafeteria. Members present were Gregory Coutcher, Chairperson; Teri Maia-Cicero, Vice Chairperson; Valerie Zuercher, Clerk; Mark Rafanelli; Theresa Donovan; Paul McFadden; and Claudine Pande. Others present: Superintendent Thomas J. Geismar, Director of Administration Robert V. Ross, and Student Member Matthew French.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – Member Pande moved to go into Executive Session at 5:26 p.m. in accordance with RIGL 42-46-4 and RIGL 42-46-5 and in accordance with RIGL 42-46-5(a)(4) for Discussion of Investigative Proceedings Regarding Allegations of Employee Misconduct; Seconded by Member Donovan; and voted as follows:

Gregory Coutcher Yes

Teri Cicero Yes

Valerie Zuercher Yes

Theresa Donovan Yes

Paul McFadden Yes

Claudine Pande Yes

Meeting recessed to Executive Session at 5:26 p.m.

Clerk Zuercher moved to move to Open Session. Member Donovan seconded the motion. Voted 6 – 0 in favor.

Meeting reconvened to Open Session at 6:05 p.m.

Attorney Ragosta left the meeting at this time, (6:05 p.m.)

No votes were taken during Executive Session.

The meeting moved from the library to the cafeteria.

Member Rafanelli arrived at this time, (6:05 p.m.).

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ORDER – Chair Coutcher called the meeting to order in Open Session at 6:15 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all and Clerk Zuercher read the District Mission Statement.

Open Forum – None

Recognitions/Achievements – JV Boys Basketball Team – State Champs – Superintendent Geismar called Coach Josh Bednarczyk and Principal Brian Butler forward to partake in the recognition of the Junior Varsity Boys Basketball Team for winning the Division III State Championship. Dr. Geismar and Principal Butler praised the work of Coach Bednarczyk and recognized team members for their efforts and accomplishment. On behalf of the School Committee, Chair Coutcher and Clerk Zuercher offered congratulations and presented each team member with recognition certificates and gift cards.

High School Gymnastics Team – State Champs – Superintendent Geismar recognized Coach Lindsay Diamond and the High School Gymnastics Team for winning this season's Division II State Championship. Coach Diamond was presented with an Apple Recognition Award for her outstanding work. Dr. Geismar and Principal Butler offered congratulations to the team and expressed admiration for the gymnastics program. On behalf of the School Committee, Chair Coutcher and Clerk Zuercher offered congratulations and presented each team member with recognition

certificates and gift cards.

RIAEA Youth Art Month Endorsement – Dr. Geismar stated that March is Youth Art Month and he recently signed the RI Art Education Association Youth Art Month Endorsement on behalf of the district and was proud to do so. He acknowledged the talents of the district's art, music, and drama faculty members and students and encouraged everyone to attend the upcoming production of Cinderella.

Chair Coutcher adjourned the meeting for a brief refreshment break at 6:25 p.m.

Chair Coutcher called the meeting back to order at 6:36 p.m.

Presentation – Student Member Report – Student Member Matthew French reported that over the past two weeks seniors have been working on their senior projects. Matthew advised that members of the student body asked him to inquire if in the future students can have assigned parking spots in the senior and junior parking lots. Lastly, Matthew introduced fellow Student Council members Angela Russo and Alexis Clements to speak about the proposed changes to the 2011 – 2012 school calendar.

Representing Student Council and the student body, Angela and Lexie expressed disagreement with the proposed elimination of February vacation from next year's school

calendar. They voiced concerns and listed various reasons why that change would be unfavorable to students. They listed numerous scheduled events that take place during February vacation that students would no longer be able to participate in. Angela said that students understand that exceptional weather conditions over the past two years have raised concerns; however, students think that contemplating eliminating February vacation for that reason might be a reactionary decision. She voiced concern that eliminating the February vacation will not be in alignment with neighboring communities. In closing, Angela stressed that students would be most affected by the proposed changes to the school calendar.

Metcalf School Presentation – Principal Mary Lou Almonte welcomed everyone to Metcalf School. She stated that her first year as principal has been wonderful and that Metcalf has a wonderful staff, great students, and EWG is a great community. She introduced 5th grade teacher Pat Jordan to share her presentation of students partaking in Accountable Talk during social studies instruction. Ms. Jordan said that this practice helps to build thinking skills for students. Principal Almonte then gave a brief overview of Metcalf student's NECAP results and reviewed strategies and programs in place to continue to improve student learning and gain academic achievement. Next,

Assistant Principal Carol Fish offered information about the strategies and programs in place to motivate students and to improve student behavior. Mrs. Fish reported that the results of a faculty survey showed teachers are in favor of moving to trimesters at Metcalf School. Two major reasons for wanting to change are that NECAP dominates first quarter and to be in line with the junior high. Next, 3rd grade teacher Gina Kilday addressed the committee and gave an overview of the K – 6 math program and the various ways that students are being taught and are becoming excited and less intimidated about learning math.

Member McFadden left the meeting at this time, (7:18 p.m.).

Mrs. Kilday extended an invitation to attend Metcalf School's Grades 3 – 6 Family Math Night next Wednesday from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Member McFadden returned to the meeting at this time, (7:20 p.m.)

Lastly, art teacher Sharon LaFrenaye gave an Art on the Internet PowerPoint Presentation illustrating the benefits of Artsonia, a safe, interactive website that students enjoy using. Artsonia is a kid's art museum where young artists and students display their artwork for other kids worldwide to view. As a final note, Ms. LaFrenaye informed members that the second annual Metcalf Community Arts Night would take place on April 28.

ROUTINE ITEMS – CONSENT AGENDA- Superintendent Geismar gave an overview of the Consent Agenda. Member McFadden requested to pull consent agenda item, 2. Leave of Absence (a) for discussion.

Clerk Zuercher made a motion to accept the consent agenda with item 2. (a) pulled. Member Pande seconded the motion. Voted 7 – 0 in favor. The motion passed.

The following items were approved:

A. Approval of Minutes - Regular Minutes of March 8, 2011

B. Personnel Items

1. Appointments – (As Recommended by the Superintendent)

a. Robert Ross as 1.0 FTE Director of Administration – Reappoint to a new 3-Year Contract/July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2014

b. Carol Nolan-Fish as 1.0 FTE Assistant Principal at Metcalf Elementary School – Reappoint to a new 3-Year Contract/July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2014

c. Jim Alves as 1.0 FTE Assistant Principal at EWG Senior high School – Reappoint to a new 3-Year Contract/July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2014

2. Leaves of Absence

a. Item Pulled

3. Resignations

4. Grievances

5. Non-Renewals

6. Recalls

7. Sabbaticals

C. Bills – In the amount of \$149,930.70

D. Home School Approvals

End Consent Agenda

Correspondence – (1) Draft School Committee Resolution (Binding Arbitration);

(2) Modified Graduation Requirement

Chair Coutcher referenced Correspondence (1) and asked for a consensus if the committee wishes for him to sign the Resolution and send it out to the representatives and senators. Superintendent Geismar reminded members that the School Committee did sign a similar Resolution one-year ago. Consensus of the School Committee was to sign and send out the (Binding Arbitration) Resolution.

Budget Update 2011 - 2012 – Superintendent Geismar referenced items enclosed in member's supplemental packets and advised that the communication items about the

budget need to go out to inform the public when, where, and how to vote on April 11.

NEW BUSINESS – Approve Charter Amendments – Chair Coutcher reported that the Charter Review Committee (CRC) has recommended two proposed changes to the charter for School Committee consideration to be placed on the ballot for the all-day referendum on April 11, 2011.

Proposed charter amendment #2 is to reapportion the makeup of the School Committee to have three members from each town with the seventh member coming from the town with the greatest population in relation to the census every ten years. Currently, Exeter has four members, West Greenwich has three, and there is no formula for change. Two different lawyers have stated that state law would override the charter and require the change anyway. Therefore, this change will bring the charter in line with the law.

Proposed amendment #1 is to eliminate motions to increase or decrease the School Committees' proposed budget in order to simplify the voting process. The CRC's rationale for proposed amendment #1 is that the current process by which amendments to the budget are submitted is very simple and requires no research or

backup. The School Committee works for months on the budget process. A citizen can choose a figure and without research or backup submit an amendment for vote.

Member McFadden stated that although he understands the concern about how amendments to the budget are devised, he could not support amendment #1 because it would be an elimination of citizens' rights to amend and it would be an erosion of the basic principles of the charter. Another concern is that voters may not be well informed.

Clerk Zuercher agreed that the amendment process should not be eliminated. Member Pande disagreed and listed the numerous steps by which administration and the School Committee prepare the budget each year. She stated that the district has a very thorough process and she believes that citizens elected the School Committee to represent their interests in a responsible manner. The School Committee understands the budget. It concerns her that a citizen is permitted to submit a number without any knowledge of the budget. Member Donovan offered her opinion that voters are accustomed to the DFM format. The new all-day referendum format is a big change for people. To also eliminate the submission of amendments would be a radical change to what voters are familiar with. She stated that if the desire is to change now, she would support collecting signatures and not the current process by which frivolous numbers are selected without thought. Member Rafanelli stated that he has mixed feelings. He agrees that amendments should remain in place however; he also agrees that the committee cannot afford to have amendment

submissions with no thought behind it. Chair Coutcher voiced his opinion that the signature requirement of only 50 or more signatures is unreasonable. Members debated whether proposing to eliminate amendments should be brought to the ballot on April 11.

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Clerk Zuercher made a motion to accept proposed Amendment #2 concerning the makeup of the School Committee based on state law.

Member Donovan requested the specific statutory reference for that state law. Dr. Geismar telephoned Attorney Brad Gorham for clarification. Attorney Gorham advised if the committee does not reapportion the makeup of the School Committee that within two to three years it would be in violation of the Constitution, the ACLU will bring complaint,

and the School Committee will be forced to comply according to the Constitution of the United States, “one person, one vote”.

Clerk Zuercher requested to restate her motion.

Clerk Zuercher made a motion that we are going to accept option #2 - reapportion based on population of the 2010 census. Member McFadden seconded the motion.

Dr. Geismar left the meeting at this time, (8:25 pm.).

Member Donovan made the observation that based on the way proposed Amendment #2 is currently written it would be conceivable that the composition of the School Committee will not necessarily result in a 4 - 3 split. The language does not say that either community will be limited to a maximum of four members. Member Donovan said that she would want that language added.

Dr. Geismar returned at this time, (8:26 p.m.).

Chair Coutcher recommended tacking on to the end that the town with the greater population will have no more than four members.

Clerk Zuercher withdrew her motion.

Clerk Zuercher made a new motion that based on the 2010 census, reapportionment of the School Committee will be the town with the greater population will have no more than four (4) members, the other town will have three (3) members, for a combined total of seven (7) members consistent with the Constitution of the U. S.

Chair Coutcher advised that the motion should be for the charter amendment going forward to the all day referendum. The language you see in front of you with the added language from Member Donovan. The motion as it stands is not to go on the all day

referendum.

Clerk Zuercher withdrew her motion.

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Member Pande moved to put the Amendment to the charter, #2 with the amendment to the language, adding into the language that the town with the largest population has no more than four (4) members representing that town, according to the census, and according to the U.S. Constitution. Member Donovan seconded the motion. Vote 7 – 0 in favor. The motion passed.

Member Pande moved the #1 Amendment to our charter to eliminate amendments to the School Committee's proposed budget be put on the all-day referendum. Vice Chair

Cicero seconded the motion. Voted 3 – 4. The motion failed.

Members McFadden, Donovan, Zuercher, and Rafanelli voted no.

Chair Coutcher recapitulated that there would be only one amendment on the all-day referendum ballot.

Approve Metcalf Report Card Change to Trimesters – Principal Almonte and Assistant Principal Fish answered/addressed members'

questions/concerns. Member Pande voiced her support for the move to a trimester report card at Metcalf School.

Clerk Zuercher made a motion to approve Metcalf Report Card Change to Trimesters. Member Rafanelli seconded the motion. Voted 7 – 0 in favor. Motion carried.

Clerk Zuercher made a motion to move up the 2011 – 2012 School Calendar item on the agenda. Seconded by Member Rafanelli. Voted 7 – 0 in favor. The motion passed.

Approve 2011 – 2012 School Calendar – Clerk Zuercher stated that student council members Angela and Lexie articulated what she had articulated at the last meeting. The elimination of February and April vacations from the school calendar would exclude EWG students from engaging in events and activities that take place during school vacation weeks. Additionally, EWG would be the only school community following that schedule. Clerk Zuercher requested to defer from changing next year's calendar, to keep February and April vacations in place, and to consider changing the calendar for the following year, if necessary.

Member Pande stated that although student council members made excellent points and she appreciates their input, the survey results conclude that parents want one vacation week. She has studied all of the draft calendars and found that beginning school after Labor Day

and having one-week vacation in March allows for two full trimesters and works best for a flow of education calendar. Chair Coutcher agreed and pointed out that many teacher survey comments reflected flow of education concerns. He stressed the importance of building more snow days into the school calendar and stated that he is in favor of starting school before Labor Day, leaving April vacation in place, and eliminating February vacation. Member Rafanelli said he agrees with Clerk Zuercher to

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leave the calendar as it is. He raised concerns that change would prevent students from attending driver's education classes.

Clerk Zuercher made a motion to keep the first original calendar that has February and April vacations in it and to start school before Labor Day. Member Rafanelli seconded the motion. Voted 3 – 4. The motion failed. Chair Coutcher, Vice Chair Cicero, Member Pande, and Member McFadden voted no.

Member McFadden moved to accept the flow of education calendar; calendar III (D) with one vacation in March. Member Pande seconded the motion.

A discussion ensued and members exchanged opinions on calendar

change vs. no calendar change. Member Donovan said that she supports keeping February and April for now and revisiting this again next year. Vice Chair Cicero stated that she is not ready to make a decision on any of the draft calendars and thinks the committee needs more time to decide. Chair Coutcher said he is in favor of one week in March; however, starting school after Labor Day defeats the purpose of eliminating one-week vacation to end school earlier.

Chair Coutcher called for a vote on Member McFadden's motion; seconded by Member Pande. Voted: 2 – 5. The motion failed. Chair Coutcher, Vice Chair Cicero, Clerk Zuercher, and Members Donovan and Rafanelli voted no.

The School Committee agreed that the two rejected calendars would be brought back for consideration at the next meeting. This item will carry over to the April 12 meeting agenda.

Clerk Zuercher left the meeting at this time, (9:14 p.m.).

Grant Writer Discussion – Dr. Geismar reported that the contract with grant writer Alicia Condon has expired. Ms. Condon is not able to continue as grant writer. He questioned whether the School Committee wishes to engage another grant writer. Member Donovan said that she supports having a grant writer. This item will continue to the next regular meeting agenda.

Discuss and Approve the Ballot for the Budget Referendum – Dr. Geismar referenced the sample all day referendum ballot and reported that he talked to Attorney Brad Gorham about how to organize the ballot to include “none of the above”. Mr. Gorham advised that there is no provision for “none of the above” in the existing policy. Therefore, that cannot be done.

Member McFadden moved to approve the proposed ballot. Member Pande seconded the motion. Voted 6 – 0 in favor. The motion passed.

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Photography Bid – Director of Administration Robert Ross reported that he and Member Pande would meet with Lifetouch Portrait Studios representatives on Monday, March 28 to discuss student photos. This item will be brought back to the April meeting agenda.

Unfinished Business – Approve Job Description for .5 Reading Supervisor Position – Chair Coutcher advised that at the request of Superintendent Geismar, this item would be continued to the next regular meeting agenda.

Dr. Geismar left the meeting at this time, (9:22 p.m.).

Absenteeism Update –Mr. Ross referenced absenteeism information provided to members and gave a brief summary of the data. Mr. Ross concluded that no employee included in the data is in violation regarding absences from work according to rights provided by the CBA.

Dr. Geismar returned to the meeting at this time, (9:26 p.m.).

Member McFadden voiced concern with the number of employees that have taken nine or more sick days. He stated his desire to find a remedy. Chair Coutcher stated that the remedy lies in the CBA. Member McFadden stated that he would like to see this data continue to be reported to the School Committee.

Vice Chair Cicero left the meeting at this time, (9:31 p.m.).

Policies Review and Adoption – 6255: Managing Personnel Records – 2nd Reading –

8301: Student School Attendance – 2nd Reading –

8305: Response—When Student is Missing from School – 2nd Reading –

8501: Rights and Responsibilities of Students and Parents – 2nd Reading –

Policies 8301, 8305, and 8501 will continue to the next regular meeting agenda for adoption.

SORICO Update – Dr. Geismar reported on the outcome of the SORICO Collaborative Council meeting that he and Member Rafanelli attended a couple of weeks ago. The SORICO Collaborative Council voted to disband SORICO at the end of June pending the sale of the building. The sale of the building is a major asset. Some of the member districts that did not elect to withdraw are of the opinion that the districts that did withdraw would still be liable for the mortgage payment on the building but would not share in the profits on the sale of the building. Following a debate, the decision that night was to allow member districts to reconsider their position about withdrawing by April 15. Attorney Henneous advised that in view of the fact that the SORICO environment has changed and has been clarified, it might be in the district's best interest to rescind its

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letter and continue with SORICO. SORICO will cease all programs and operations at the end of June so there will be no liability incurred other than the maintenance of the building. The debate surrounding whether the district would be liable for part of the mortgage is questionable. Dr. Geismar stated that he would bring additional information about the building to Attorney Henneous and they will discuss this matter further. Based on Attorney Henneous' opinion and on Dr. Geismar and Member Rafanelli's sense of the circumstances, Dr. Geismar said that he would bring the School

Committee his recommendation at the next meeting. This item will continue to the next regular meeting agenda.

Capital Project Update – Dr. Geismar advised that tomorrow night’s Capital Project Building Committee meeting has been postponed until early April.

Reports/Comments – Chair Coutcher returned to the item Member McFadden pulled from the consent agenda. Member McFadden said that he read the CBA and the request for a six-month leave of absence does not meet the criteria. Dr. Geismar stated that he is recommending this leave under CBA description, “Other purpose deemed proper and approved by the Superintendent”. This individual has been working for the district for 23-years. She is experiencing a personal issue, not of her making. She is not leaving to try another job. At the end of six-months, she will return and take up her duties again or will resign if necessary.

Member Pande moved to approve the request for a leave of absence. Member Donovan seconded the motion. Voted 5 – 0 in favor. The motion passed.

The following consent agenda item was approved:

VII. Routine Items

Consent Agenda

B. Personnel Items

2. Leaves of Absence – (As Recommended by the Superintendent) –

(ENCLOSED)

a. Request for a Leave of Absence from Carol Belanger from her position as 1.0 FTE Special Education Teacher Assistant at Lineham School, effective for the first 6-months of the 2011 – 2012 school year

Important Dates and Meetings – Monday, April 11, 2011 – All-day Referendum; Tuesday, April 12, 2011 – School Committee Meeting; Tuesday, April 26, 2011 – School Committee Meeting

EXECUTIVE SESSION – RIGL 42-46-4 and RIGL 42-46-5 – None

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Adjournment - Member Donovan moved to adjourn. Member Pande seconded the motion. Voted 5 – 0 in favor. Meeting adjourned at 9:42 p.m.

ROBIN CERIO

CLERK